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PIM SPARSE MODE TO SOURCE SPECIFIC MULTICAST CONVERSION

Daniel Alvarez
Arjen Boers
Toerless Eckert
Ijsbrand Wijnands

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] Internet Protocols (IPs) are employed in networks to transmit data such as audio and video data from a source device (*e.g.*, a server computer system) to one or more receiver devices (*e.g.*, desktop computer systems). Unicast, broadcast, and multicast are three well known techniques for transmitting data between source and receiver devices. Unicast is a point-to-point communication technique in which data is transmitted between only two devices (*i.e.*, one source and one receiver). Broadcast communication enables one source to transmit data to all receivers in a broadcast domain. Multicasting allows a source or several sources to transmit data simultaneously to select receivers, *i.e.*, those receivers in a multicast group. Multicast data or packets are replicated in the network by multicast enabled routers at the point where communication paths diverge to separate receivers. In this fashion, the multicast protocol delivers data to multiple receivers without burdening the source or consuming excessive network bandwidth.

[0002] There are several versions of the multicast protocol, including Sparse Mode (SM) and Source Specific Mode (SSM) protocols. Figure 1 illustrates relevant components of a network 10 that can employ either SM or SSM protocols. More particularly, Figure 1 shows sources 12a and 12b coupled to receivers 14a – 14d via a series of routers 16 – 16d and communication links 20.

[0003] In an SM network, the various multicast enabled routers establish a default multicast distribution tree, referred to as a “shared tree,” for each multicast group.

Each shared tree is rooted at a rendezvous point (RP) router that acts as the distribution point for multicast data transmitted to receivers of a multicast group. Before a source device can begin transmitting data to receivers of a multicast group, the device must first register with the RP router. Moreover, for a device to join a multicast group as a receiver, the device must join towards the RP router. Once a device joins a multicast group as a receiver, the RP router establishes a communication path between one or more sources and the newly joined receiver.

[0004] To further illustrate, presume that router 16a is configured in network 10 as the RP router for a multicast group G_1 consisting of receiver devices 14a and 14d. Further, presume that device 14b seeks to join multicast group G_1 as a receiver. Device 14b can join the multicast group by first generating a membership report in compliance with Internet Management Group Protocol version 1 (IGMPv1) or Internet Management Group Protocol version 2 (IGMPv2). The identity G_1 of the multicast group is included in the membership report along with the identity (*e.g.*, an Internet address) of device 14b. The IGMP membership report is transmitted by device 14b to uplink router 16b via uplink 22a. Uplink router 16b, in response to receiving the IGMP report from device 14b, generates a request to join multicast group G_1 . In an SM network, this request is designated PIM (*, G_1) JOIN, and its sent hop by hop towards the RP router. In SM protocol, the * within the request indicates that the device (*e.g.*, device 14b) seeking to join multicast group G_1 should receive data from all sources providing data to the multicast group G_1 . Thus, if sources 12a and 12b are providing data to receivers within the multicast group G_1 , device 14b will receive data from both sources 12a and 12b once device 14b joins multicast group G_1 as a receiver. For purposes of explanation, it will be presumed that device 12a is the only source providing data to multicast group G_1 .

[0005] The PIM (*, G_1) JOIN is transmitted by uplink router 16b to RP router 16a. RP router 16a, in response to receiving PIM (*, G_1) JOIN, may establish a communication path between source 12a and itself creating a full path between the source and the receiver through the RP that includes routers 16a, 16b, and 16c. Once this communication path is established, source device 12a transmits data to receivers. Devices 14a, 14c and 14d can similarly join group G_1 using the multicast technique described above to also receive data traffic from source 12a. It is noted that the SM protocol may be defined in Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) Request For

Comments (RFC) 2362 entitled "Protocol Independent Multicast – Sparse Mode (PIM-SM): Protocol Specification," published in June 1998, and hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0006] After the communication path is established between source device 12a and receiver device 14b via routers 16a, 16b, and 16c, uplink router 16b may trigger a routine to select a faster and/or more efficient communication path between source device 12a and receiver device 14b that does not include RP router 16a. For example, RP router may establish a new communication path between source device 12a and receiver device 14b that includes only routers 16d and 16b. However, selecting and establishing a more efficient communication path between source 12a and receiver 14b adds some protocol complexity. Once a new and more efficient communication path is established between source device 12a and receiver device 14b, the original communication path is pruned such that only two routers 16d and 16b must be utilized as opposed to three routers 16c, 16a and 16b of the former communication path. This source specific path between 12a and 14b for group G_1 is called a source tree and is represented by the notation (S,G), which in this case would result in (12a, G_1) and provides the shortest path between the source and the receivers.

[0007] As noted above, network 10 may also operate according to SSM protocol. Unlike an SM network, an SSM network does not employ an RP router. In an SSM protocol network, when a device seeks to join a multicast group as a receiver, the device will know in advance the identity of the source from which it seeks to receive data. This enables a new receiver to directly join a multicast group on the shortest path tree towards the source(*i.e.*, without first going through an RP router). Compared to an SM protocol network, an SSM protocol network is more efficient. However, with an SSM network, a receiver device can receive data from only one source (or few sources) within a multicast group. For purposes of explanation, presume that network 10 operates according to SSM protocol, and that devices 14a and 14c are members of a multicast group G_2 that receive data from source 12a. Further, presume that device 14b seeks to join multicast group G_2 as a new receiver.

[0008] Typically, before device 14b can join multicast group G_2 , device 14b must generate a membership report using IGMP version 3 (IGMPv3) protocol. It is noted that device 14b can join multicast group G_2 as a receiver even though device 14b

executes only IGMPv1 or IGMPv2 if device 14b and/or router 16b implement the method described in U.S. Patent Application Number 10/208,977 entitled "Source Specific Multicast Group to Source Mapping," filed on July 31, 2002; Attorney Docket Number CIS0174US. The foregoing patent application is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. However, for purposes of explanation, it will be presumed that device 14b operates according to IGMPv3 only. The IGMPv3 membership report identifies both the source device 12a and the multicast group that device 14b wishes to join. In contrast, the IGMPv1 or IGMPv2 membership report generated for an SM protocol network device does not identify the source from which data is sought. The IGMPv3 report generated by device 14b is transmitted to uplink router 16b via uplink 22a. Thereafter uplink router 16b establishes a communication path between source device 12a and device 14b via routers 16b and 16d. With this communication path (12a,G₂) established, source device 12a transmits data to receiver device 14b via routers 16d and 16b while also transmitting data to the other receivers in multicast group G₂.

[0009] Figure 1 presumes that network 10 operates according to either SM protocol or SSM protocol, but not both. Figure 2 illustrates a network in which both SM and SSM protocols are employed. More particularly, Figure 2 shows a network 28 consisting of a subnetwork 30 that operates according to SSM protocol, and a subnetwork 32 that operates according to SM protocol. Subnetwork 30 consists of a pair of devices (*e.g.*, computer systems such as servers) 36 that act as source devices. Further, subnetwork 30 includes a pair of multicast enabled routers 44 coupled to source devices 36 via uplink 42. Subnetwork 32 includes devices 40 (*e.g.*, computer systems such as desktops) that can act as receivers. Subnetwork 32 also includes multicast enabled routers 44 coupled to each other via communication links 46 and to devices 40 via uplinks 42a and 42b. Lastly, subnetwork 30 is coupled to subnetwork 32 via communication links 50 and 52. Although Figure 2 shows direct communication between subnetworks 30 and 32, subnetworks 30 and 32 may be indirectly coupled together. For example, communication link 50 and/or 52 may take form in the Internet operating according to TCP/IP.

[0010] As noted, subnetwork 30 operates according to SSM protocol while subnetwork 32 operates according to SM protocol. Because of differences between these multicast protocols, receiver devices 40 within subnetwork 32, executing

IGMPv1 or IGMPv2, could not receive multicast data to which devices 36 are sources. It is noted that receiver devices 40 could join a multicast group to which source devices 36 provide data if receiver devices 40 and/or routers 44b and 44e implement the invention described in U.S. Patent Application Number 10/208,977. Configuring such devices (e.g., routers 44b and 44e) according to the invention described in U.S. Patent Application Number 10/208,977 may require a significant amount of time, cost, and effort, particularly if subnetwork 32 contains several thousand devices that provide connectivity to other receiver devices 40.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] A method, apparatus, or computer executable instructions for converting Protocol Independent Mode (PIM) requests. In one embodiment, the method includes receiving a first multicast routing protocol (MRP) message, wherein the first MRP message is a request to join a multicast group. The first MRP message is translated into a second MRP message, wherein the second MRP message is a request to join the multicast group to which data is being provided by a specific source. The method could be performed by a router contained in a sparse mode (SM) network, wherein the sparse mode network is coupled to a source specific mode (SSM) network that contains the specific source.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] The present invention may be better understood, and its numerous objects, features, and advantages made apparent to those skilled in the art by referencing the accompanying drawings.

[0013] Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating relevant components of a network which can employ either SM or SSM protocol;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating relevant components of a network in which both the SM and SSM protocols are employed;

Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating relevant components of a network in which the present invention may be employed;

Fig. 4 represents a look-up used in translating SM requests to join a multicast group into SSM requests to join the multicast group and source;

Fig. 5 is a flow chart illustrating operational aspects of translating SM requests to join a multicast group into SSM requests to join the multicast group and source.

[0014] The use of the same reference symbols in different drawings indicates similar or identical items.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] The present invention provides a method, apparatus, or computer executable instructions which, when executed, enables devices in an SM network to communicate with devices in an SSM network, even when devices in the SM network operate according to IGMPv1 or IGMPv2 protocol only.

[0016] Figure 3 illustrates a network 60 employing one embodiment of the present invention. It is noted that the invention may be employed in a network different from that illustrated in Figure 3. The network 60 shown in Figure 3 is similar to the network 28 shown in Figure 2. While network 60 is similar to network 28, there are substantial differences. More particularly, router 44c, rather than router 44a, is designated the RP router for SM protocol subnetwork 32. RP router 44c represents an edge router (*i.e.*, a router through which data flows between subnetworks 30 and 32 without having to pass through other routers of subnetwork 32).

[0017] RP router 44c is also configured according to one embodiment of the present invention. More particularly, RP router 44c includes SM to SSM conversion unit 61 and lookup table (LUT) 62. While conversion unit 61 can be implemented in hardware (*e.g.*, an application specific integrated circuit), conversion unit 61 will be presumed to be implemented as instructions executing on one or more processors contained within router 44c. Further, as will be more fully described below, LUT 62 includes a plurality of entries, each of which relates a multicast group G_i to the corresponding identity S_j of a device (*e.g.*, one of source devices 36) that provides data to receivers of the multicast group G_i .

[0018] As will be more fully described below, conversion unit 61 converts an SM request to join a multicast group (PIM (*, G_i) JOIN) into an SSM request to join a multicast group (PIM(S_j , G_i) JOIN). Conversion unit 61 thus enables devices 40 of SM subnetwork 32 to join a multicast group to which data is provided by a source device 36 of SSM subnetwork 30 without reconfiguring devices 40 according to the principles set forth in U.S. Patent Application 10/208,977.

[0019] To illustrate, presume that device 40a seeks to join a multicast group G_3 , and that device 36a (identified as S_2) is the source that provides data to receiver devices of multicast group G_3 . Before receiver device 40a can join multicast group G_3 , such

device 40a, operating according to IGMPv1 or IGMPv2, generates a membership report identifying G_3 as the multicast group which device 40a seeks to join as a receiver. It is noted again that the membership report does not include S_2 , the identity of source device 36a. The membership report is subsequently transmitted to uplink router 44b via uplink 42a. Multicast router 44b receives the membership report from device 40a and, in turn, generates an SM request to join (PIM (*, G_3) JOIN) multicast group G_3 . According to normal SM protocol, PIM (*, G_3) JOIN is transmitted to RP router 44c. Note that it is not required that router 44c be the RP for G_3 . It may be required that all PIM (*, G) JOINS travel through router 44c (having router 44c be the RP for G is one way of accomplishing this).

[0020] Conversion unit 61 receives PIM (*, G_3) JOIN, or is otherwise notified that the SM request to join multicast group G_3 has been received by RP router 44c. In turn, conversion unit 61 accesses LUT 62 using the multicast group identity G_3 of the request. Figure 4 represents exemplary contents of one embodiment of LUT 62. More particularly, Figure 4 shows a table 70 having a plurality of entries. Each entry relates particular multicast groups address G_i to a particular source identifier S_j . Lookup table 62 returns to conversion unit 61 the identity (*e.g.*, the address of source device 36a) S_2 of the source corresponding to multicast group address G_3 . Conversion unit 61 subsequently generates an SSM request to join PIM (G_3 , S_2) JOIN from PIM (*, G_3) JOIN and the result of the lookup in table 62. RP router 44c then transmits PIM (G_3 , S_2) JOIN to subnetwork 30. Thereafter, a communication path is established directly between source device 36a and receiver device 40a that includes multicast router 44d of subnetwork 32 and multicast router 44f of subnetwork 30. It is noted that the direct communication path between source 36a and receiver 40a is established without first establishing a communication path through the RP router 44c. Accordingly, a communication path is established between source 36a and receiver 40a in a time that is shorter than that described with reference to Figure 2.

[0021] Figure 5 is a flow chart illustrating relevant steps for establishing a communication path between devices in subnetworks operating under different multicast protocols using one embodiment of the present invention. More particularly, the flow chart in Figure 5 begins when a device within, for example, an SM network generates an IMPGv2 report to join multicast group address G_m . Thereafter, in step 82, the device transmits the IMPGv2 report to its uplink router.

The uplink router, in turn, generates an $PIM(*,G_m)$ request to join. In step 86, the uplink router transmits the $PIM(*,G_m)$ request to join to the RP router of the SM protocol network. The RP router in step 90 converts the $PIM(*,G_m)$ request to join into an $PIM(S_n,G_m)$ request to join. The RP router transmits the $PIM(S_n,G_m)$ request to join to the SSM subnetwork that contains source S_n . Lastly, in step 96, a direct communication path is established between source device S_n and the device requesting to join the multicast group G_m .

[0022] Although the present invention has been described in connection with several embodiments, the invention is not intended to be limited to any specific form set forth herein. On the contrary, it is intended to cover such alternatives, modifications, and equivalents as can be reasonably included within the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.